

Calculating Dates for Religious Feast Dates

What are Feast Days and Why Is This Important?

One of the hardest things to deal with when using parish registers is that event dates are many times listed as the feast day associated with the date. There are many "fixed" holiday/feast days such as Christmas which is always December 25; however, You will see such entries as "dom 3 p. Trin" meaning third Sunday after Trinity feast day. These feast days are moveable for the most part since most are based around Easter.

Since the ecclesiastical calendar is based on lunar rather than solar cycles, certain key holidays (feasts) occur on different days each year. The method of calculating these feasts has also changed since the council of Nicea (325 A.D.).

In the past, you must have access to a book with tables to find out what the date was, but now a feast day calculator is available online.

Accessing the Feast Day Calculator

- Go to <http://www.albion.edu/english/calendar/easter.htm>

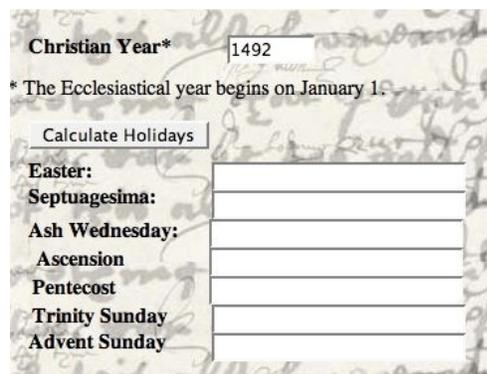
Using the Feast Day Calculator

For the purposes of calculation, This site assumes that the ecclesiastical year begins on January first, even though this standard was only gradually accepted. If you are working with early monastic documents you might want to consider that dates from December 25th through March may be "off" by one year. To a Benedictine, for instance (to whom the year began on December 25th), the feast of the Innocents in 1450 would be December 28th, 1450, while to others it might be December 28th, 1449. In fact, before 1582, most calendars did not have the year begin on January 1st, even though the calculation of the moveable feasts acted as if it did. In England, the year "began" either on December 25th, or, more frequently on March 25th (Lady Day), until 1752. These vagaries are not something I wanted to include in the calculations, since they often varied quite a bit. The calculations for the holidays will take into account the days dropped from the calendar when the "New style" was adopted, since these affect the month and day of Easter. Conventions about the beginning of the year are easily corrected for.

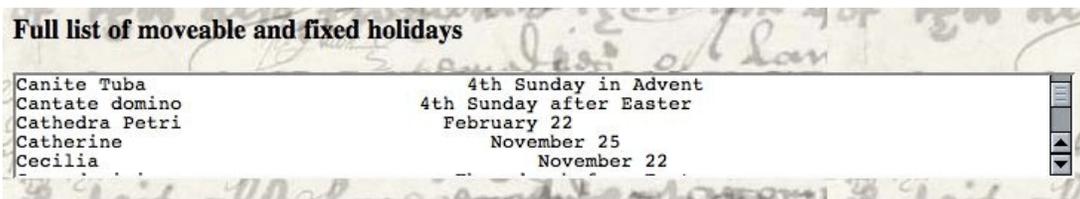
The button labeled "Calculate Holidays" calculates the dates of seven major feasts for the year entered in the field labeled "Year", and displays the results below this field. The only restrictions are that the number entered in the field "Year" must be an integer (no fractions) greater than zero. However, the holidays generated are only valid for dates since 325 A.D.

NOTE: It says "After 1570, add one week"; however, using the Ecclesiastical calendar table that is available in book form at the Family History Library, you do not need to add the week for years after 1570. (At least for Danish feast days – it may be different for English (England) feast days.)

- Enter the year in the **Christian Year** field
- Click on **Calculate Holidays** button
- The major holidays will appear in the blanks below.



- To view the full list of moveable and fixed holidays, use the scroll bar for the section.



Full list of moveable and fixed holidays	
Canite Tuba	4th Sunday in Advent
Cantate domino	4th Sunday after Easter
Cathedra Petri	February 22
Catherine	November 25
Cecilia	November 22